

## Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01 INR-07  
L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15  
USIA-06 TRSE-00 /058 W  
-----051907Z 070880 /45

R 051810Z APR 77  
FM AMEMBASSY LONDON  
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2402  
INFO AMEMBASSY BONN  
AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS  
AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN  
AMEMBASSY DUBLIN  
AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE  
AMEMBASSY LUXEMBOURG  
AMEMBASSY PARIS  
AMEMBASSY ROME  
USMISSION EC BRUSSELS  
USMISSION NATO BRUSSELS  
USMISSION OECD PARIS

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TAGS: PFOR, PGOV, PINT, UK, EEC  
SUBJECT: EC DIRECT ELECTIONS: WHITE PAPER PUBLISHED

REF: LONDON 3371

SUMMARY. THE GOVERNMENT APRIL 1 PUBLISHED ITS WHITE PAPER ON DIRECT ELECTIONS TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT. AS ANTICIPATED, THE WHITE PAPER MERELY EXAMINED THREE ELECTORAL SYSTEM OPTIONS -- "FIRST-PAST-THE-POST" IN DEFINED GEOGRAPHIC CONSTITUENCIES' PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION (PR) BASED ON NATIONAL OR REGIONAL LISTS' AND PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION BASED ON A SINGLE TRANS-  
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FERABLE VOTE (STV) -- AND THE POSSIBILITY OF MANDATORY DUAL MANDATE, WITHOUT EXPRESSING ANY PREFERENCE. NOTWITHSTANDING THE GOVERNMENT'S RECENT COMMITMENT TO ALLOW A FREE VOTE ON THE ELECTORAL SYSTEM QUESTION, OUR READING OF PARLIAMENTARY SENTIMENT INDICATES THAT PARLIAMENT WILL ULTIMATELY DECIDE ON THE FIRST-PAST-THE-POST SYSTEM. AND THAT IS LIKELY TO ENTAIL SOME SLIP-

PAGE IN THE MAY 1978 ELECTION TARGET DATE. END SUMMARY.

1. THE EC DIRECT ELECTIONS WHITE PAPER ("DIRECT ELECTIONS TO THE EUROPEAN ASSEMBLY") WAS PUBLISHED APRIL 1. WHILE VARIOUS ELECTORAL SYSTEM OPTIONS WERE SET FORTH IN AN EVEN-HANDED MANNER AND SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS WERE AVOIDED, THE PAPER WAS CAREFUL TO NOTE THAT THE CURRENT EC DIRECT ELECTIONS AGREEMENT PERMITS THE PLANNED ELECTIONS TO BE "GOVERNED BY THE NATIONAL PROVISIONS OF EACH MEMBER STATE". THE SINGLE EXCEPTION TO THE GENERAL ABSENCE OF SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS INVOLVED NORTHERN IRELAND, WHERE THE GOVERNMENT COMMITTED ITSELF TO EXTENDING THE STV SYSTEM CURRENTLY IN USE FOR LOCAL AND REGIONAL ELECTIONS.

2. DISCUSSING POSSIBLE ELECTORAL PROCEDURES, THE WHITE PAPER OUTLINED THE FOLLOWING OPTIONS, WITH THEIR RESPECTIVE PROS AND CONS:

-- AN EXTENSION OF THE CURRENT BRITISH SYSTEM BASED ON A SIMPLE MAJORITY IN A SINGLE MEMBER, GEOGRAPHIC CONSTITUENCY (FIRST-PAST-THE-POST) WOULD REINFORCE BRITAIN'S DISTINCTIVE ELECTORAL SYSTEM WHICH EVOLVED OVER THE CENTURIES, IS WELL UNDERSTOOD BY THE ELECTORATE AND PARTIES, AND IS TIME-TESTED. AMONG ITS OTHER ADVANTAGES ARE THE FACTS THAT VOTERS ARE ABLE TO IDENTIFY DIRECTLY WITH A SINGLE REPRESENTATIVE, THAT THE REPRESENTATIVE IS DIRECTLY ACCOUNTABLE TO HIS CONSTITUENTS AND THAT SELECTION OF CANDIDATES IS DECENTRALIZED. LISTING THE DRAWBACKS, THE PAPER NOTES LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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THAT SUCH A SYSTEM WOULD BE A VARIANCE WITH THE OTHER MEMBER COUNTRIES, THAT THE RESULTS WOULD BE DISPROPORTIONATELY INFLUENCED BY SLIGHT CHANGES IN ELECTORAL OPINION AND THAT IN THE EVENT A DOMESTIC ELECTION FELL BETWEEN EC PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS, THERE COULD BE WIDE DIVERGENCES BETWEEN THE PARTY IN POWER AND THE COMPOSITION OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT DELEGATION. THE PROCEDURES FOR SETTING UP SINGLE MEMBER CONSTITUENCIES WOULD ALSO BE TIME-CONSUMING AND HAVE TO BE SLIGHTLY CURTAILED IF BRITAIN IS TO MAKE THE MAY-JUNE 1978 ELECTION TIMEFRAME.

-- ADOPTION OF A LIST SYSTEM OF PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION, EITHER NATIONAL OR REGIONAL, WOULD BRING BRITISH PRACTICE INTO LINE WITH THAT OF MOST OTHER EC COUNTRIES AND AVOID MOST OF THE DRAWBACKS INHERENT IN THE SIMPLE MAJORITY PROCEDURE. HOWEVER, "TO ABANDON OUR TRADITIONAL METHOD IN THIS WAY WOULD BE A MAJOR CONSTITUTIONAL INNOVATION, THE CONSEQUENCES OF WHICH ARE DIFFICULT TO FORESEE". THIS SYSTEM WOULD ALSO

GIVE NATIONAL AND REGIONAL PARTY ORGANIZATIONS INCREASED  
POWER, COULD CONFUSE THE ELECTORATE AND WOULD REDUCE  
THE ACCOUNTABILITY OF ELECTED DELEGATES.  
-- THE STV SYSTEM, AS USED IN NI, WOULD INVOLVE  
MULTI-MEMBER CONSTITUENCIES AND ALLOW ELECTORS TO VOTE

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FOR SEVERAL CANDIDATES IN ORDER OF PREFERENCE. IT  
WOULD INCREASE A VOTER'S INFLUENCE, ALLOWING HIM TO  
CHOOSE BETWEEN BOTH CANDIDATES AND PARTIES, WHILE PRE-  
SERVING THE CONSTITUENCY CONCEPT. IT IS, HOWEVER,  
THE MOST COMPLEX OF THE OPTIONS FROM THE ELECTOR'S  
STANDPOINT AND WOULD STILL LEAVE BRITAIN AT VARIANCE  
WITH MOST OF THE EC.

3. THE WHITE PAPER ALSO RAISED THE ISSUE OF COMPULSORY  
DUAL MANDATE, SUGGESTING THAT BY REQUIRING DELEGATES  
TO THE EUROPEAN ASSEMBLY ALSO BE MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT

(OR PEERS, SINCE THE WHITE PAPER WOULD ALLOW THEM TO  
BE ELECTED TO THE ASSEMBLY) THE RISK OF MAJOR DIVER-  
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GENCE BETWEEN THE ELECTED MEMBERS OF THE TWO BODIES  
WOULD BE MINIMIZED. THE GOVERNMENT, HOWEVER, ACKNOWL-  
EDGED THAT THIS WOULD IMPOSE A GREAT BURDEN ON INDIVID-  
UAL MEMBERS AND REFRAINED FROM MAKING A FIRM RECOM-  
MENDATION.

4. THE WHITE PAPER ALSO REVIEWED THE EARLIER REPORT  
OF THE COMMONS' SELECT COMMITTEE, GENERALLY ACCEPTING  
ITS PROCEDURAL RECOMMENDATIONS, BUT NOTING THAT SOME  
PROCEDURAL CHANGES WOULD BE REQUIRED IF EITHER THE  
LIST OR STV SYSTEMS WERE ADOPTED. BUT IT STRESSED  
THE "UNDESIRABILITY OF MAKING MAJOR CONSTITUTIONAL  
CHANGES UNLESS THEY HAVE A WIDE MEASURE OF SUPPORT".

5. COMMENT - AS WE HAVE NOTED AND WAS STRIKINGLY  
ILLUSTRATED WITH REGARD TO THE DEVOLUTION BILL, PARLIA-  
MENT IS A PROFOUNDLY CONSERVATIVE BODY WHEN IT COMES  
TO MAJOR CONSTITUTIONAL CHANGE AND, AS THE WHITE PAPER  
SEEMS TO STRESS, DIRECT ELECTIONS FALL SQUARELY INTO  
THAT CATEGORY. OUR SOUNDINGS OF BACKBENCH VIEWS ON  
BOTH SIDES OF THE AISLE INDICATE THAT THE OVERWHELMING  
MAJORITY OF BOTH TORY AND LABOR MPS FAVOR ADOPTION OF  
THE SIMPLE MAJORITY/GEOGRAPHIC CONSTITUENCY SYSTEM.  
THE APRIL 5 PRESS REPORTS THAT OVER 70 CONSERVATIVE  
MPS HAVE ALREADY SIGNED AN EARLY DAY MOTION SUPPORTING  
THIS SYSTEM FOR THE EC ELECTIONS, WHILE THE TORY FRONT-  
BENCH IS VIGOROUSLY OPPOSED TO PR IN ANY FORM. AS FOR  
LABOR, MOST MPS REALIZE THAT THEIR PARTY IS LIKELY TO  
DO VERY POORLY ON A SIMPLE MAJORITY BASIS, BUT ARE NON-  
PLUSSED AND QUICK TO POINT OUT THAT THE EUROPEAN  
PARLIAMENT HAS FEW POWERS. ACCORDINGLY, WE SEE LITTLE  
PROSPECT, DESPITE LIBERAL HOPES, OF PARLIAMENT APPROV-  
ING A PR SYSTEM.

6. THIS BEING THE CASE, THE QUESTION BOILS DOWN TO  
WHETHER BRITAIN WILL BE ABLE TO MEET THE MAY-JUNE  
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1978 TARGET DATE AND, IF NOT, WHETHER SOME SLIPPAGE  
WOULD DAMAGE ITS RELATIONS WITH ITS EC PARTNERS. FROM  
OUR VANTAGE POINT, SOME SLIPPAGE IN THE TIMETABLE SEEMS  
UNAVOIDABLE. FIRST, THE BILL'S PASSAGE THROUGH PARLIA-

MENT IS EXPECTED TO BE TIME-CONSUMING AND, SHOULD COMMONS OPT FOR THE FIRST-PAST-THE-POST SYSTEM, AS WE ANTICIPATE, THERE MAY WELL BE FURTHER DELAY IN THE HOUSE OF LORDS. SENTIMENT IN LORDS APPEARS TO BE SUCH THAT THEY WILL TRY AT LEAST ONCE TO AMEND THE BILL TO PROVIDE FOR A PR SYSTEM. ALTHOUGH WE BELIEVE THAT COMMONS WILL ULTIMATELY PREVAIL, INTRA-PARLIAMENTARY DIFFERENCES WOULD DELAY THE BILL FURTHER. ONLY AFTER THE BILL IS ENACTED CAN A COMMISSION BE ESTABLISHED TO DETERMINE CONSTITUENCY BOUNDARIES. EVEN WITH THE GOVERNMENT'S APPARENT COMMITMENT TO A TRUNCATED BOUNDARIES APPEAL PROCESS, THIS TASK WILL TAKE SEVERAL MONTHS. AS THIS SCENARIO PLAYS OUT, WE EXPECT THE GOVERNMENT WILL ARGUE (AND PROBABLY EXAGGERATE) THAT DELAY WILL DAMAGE BRITAIN'S RELATIONS WITH ITS EC PARTNERS. WE CANNOT, OF COURSE, FULLY ASSESS THE ACCURACY OF SUCH FEARS. HOWEVER, A MEMBER OF THE EC COMMISSION STAFF LAST WEEK TOLD EMBOFFS THAT THE EC DOES NOT REGARD THE ACTUAL ELECTION DATE AS IMPORTANT, AND THAT A DELAY OF A FEW MONTHS IS UNLIKELY TO HAVE A SIGNIFICANT EFFECT ON RELATIONS BETWEEN EC COUNTRIES, AS LONG AS LAGGARDS ARE PERCEIVED AS TAKING REASONABLE ACTION TO HONOR THEIR COMMITMENTS. FROM LONDON AT LEAST, CALLAGHAN SEEMS TO BE MEETING THAT REQUIREMENT.

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## Message Attributes

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